CLAIMS:

1. A method of obtaining technical support for a data-processing device, comprising initiating a support session during which device-specific data is conveyed from the device to a support provider to assist the support provider in responding to a support query, and polling the support provider for a response to the query, on a repeated and automated basis, until a response becomes available or the support session is terminated.

2. A method according to claim 1 wherein the polling is effected by a polling application obtained from the support provider.

3. A method according to claim 2 wherein the polling application, during the support session, is executed subsequent to each boot or start-up sequence of the device.

4. A method according to claim 2 wherein the polling application, during the support session, is stored on or on behalf of the device, in a manner whereby the application is executed subsequent to each boot or start-up sequence of the device.

5. A method according to claim 3 wherein, in a Windows O.S. environment, a Run key located in or operatively associated with the registry of the device is used to execute the application, subsequent to each said boot or start-up sequence.

6. A method according to claim 5 wherein, upon termination of the support session, the Run key is removed or disabled.

7. A method according to claim 6 wherein the application subsequently is deleted using a delete command executed in accordance with a Run Once key located in or operatively associated with the registry.

8. A method according to claim 2 wherein the support session is established using a web connection and wherein the polling application is downloaded from the support provider using an applet.

5 9. A method according to claim 8 wherein the applet is operative to download a data harvester to gather the device-specific data.

10. A method according to claim 8 wherein the applet is used only in response to an indication of trust being given by a user of the device.

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11. A method according to claim 10 wherein the support provider conveys to the user a trust request, agreement to the request allowing execution of the applet.

12. A method according to claim 1 wherein the polling is effected using HTTP.

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13. A method of providing asynchronous web-based active technical support from a support provider to a user of an electronic device during a support session, the method comprising receiving device-specific data to assist the support provider in responding to a support query, dispatching a polling application operative to poll the

20 support provider for a response to the query and notifying the user that a response has become available, the polling application being dispatched, from or on behalf of the support provider, in response to an instruction generated using a trusted applet.

14. A server-side technical support source comprising a web server to participate

25 in asynchronous messaging with a client-side device, the support source being operative to supply, to the device, a polling application whereby repeated polling of the support source for a response to a support query may be effected, the polling application being supplied to the device using a trusted applet.

30 15. A software element for use in the provision of technical support to a user of a data-processing device which, in response to an indication of trust being given by the user, is operative to effect or permit a download of a polling element whereby a

support provider may be polled, on a repeated and automated basis, for a response to a support query.

16. A software element according to claim 15 in the form of an applet, the polling element being transmissible from the support provider using HTTP.

17. A software element according to claim 16 wherein the polling element has a data footprint of no more than about 50 KB.

18. A method of obtaining technical support for a data-processing device, comprising: establishing a support session using a web connection during which device-specific data is conveyed from the device to a support provider to assist the support provider in responding to a support query; downloading a polling application from the support provider using a trusted applet and polling, using the polling application, the support provider for a response to the query, on a repeated and automated basis, until a response becomes available or the support session is terminated.

19. A method according to claim 18 wherein the polling application, during the support session, is executed subsequent to each boot or start-up sequence of the device.

20. A method according to claim 18 wherein the applet is operative to download a data harvester to gather the device-specific data.